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The Little Lad of Bethlehem Town

By Emily Huntington Miller

	"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night."	

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B. PLOCKHORST

APPARITION TO THE SHEPHERDS

*"It was she who said,
‘Fear not,’ and I looked up and
did not fear."*

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SCENE ONE

Night on the hills above Bethlehem. Three shepherds are in a group; a fourth sits apart, father of the little lad who sits near him with one arm around a shaggy sheep-dog. : : : : :

COME closer, lad. I like to feel
you near.

FATHER

My little David—little moth-
erless lamb—

But six tonight, and she a year in
heaven!

How near the stars are, father. Do
you think

DAVID

My mother can look down and see
us here?

Perhaps—it may be so—I cannot
tell.

FATHER

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DAVID And speak to us, because it is my
birthday?

FATHER I do not think so. She would surely
speak

DAVID Seeing how sad we are with her away.
What does she do in heaven?

FATHER Praise God, and go His errands to
and fro.

DAVID O then she might perchance be sent
this way,
And we could see her as she passed
along.

DOST think my mother could forget
to love us,

HAVING so many joys in God's great
heaven?

FATHER Not so! O never so! & yet the Rabbis
Say it may be the soul goes back to
God,



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As the drop to the ocean, when the clay
That held it crumbles to its native
dust.

My mother was not clay—

DAVID

What then, dear lad?

FATHER

I cannot tell. Some soft, sweet, shin-
ing stuff

DAVID

That makes the flowers, and bird
songs, and the sunshine—

What are God's errands, father? Do
His angels

Feed the wild birds, and paint the
sunset clouds,

And lead the stars out in a shining
flock—

And shake the dew down on the grass
at night,

And fill the little brooks brim full
of rain

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For all the thirsty sheep to come and drink?

FATHER It might be so. We know they do His will

But no eye sees them as they come and go—

How light it grows! almost as if the dawn

DAVID Already had begun—

Look, father! See the glory in the sky,

As if a door were opened into heaven!

O look! look!

SCENE TWO

As the splendor deepens the shepherds fall on their faces and the lad stands gazing upward, silent, but not afraid. The voice cries, "Fear not," and tells of the wondrous birth, and the vision of angels sweeps by with the song of praise. The shepherds slowly rise and look at each other.

You heard it? you and you? and
saw the angels?

FIRST
SHEPHERD

Surely no mortal eyes have
seen such things

Since Jacob slept at Bethel—

Or such a song rang out since first
the stars

Together sang above a new-born
world.

SECOND
SHEPHERD

Come, let us go to Bethlehem, that
our eyes

May see ^{the} Hope of Israel, born today,
And spread the tidings.

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FATHER But here's the lad, my David—
FIRST SHEPHERD Leave him: he'll sleep; the dog will
 guard him well.

DAVID O father! take me with you—
FIRST SHEPHERD Or let him stay ^{with} Joseph in the lodge
 Down by the olive garden.

DAVID Father, dear! I will not hinder; I
 will run so fast.

SECOND SHEPHERD We'll soon be back; nothing can
 harm you, lad.

DAVID Father, you promised. 'Twas my
 birthday treat,
 To watch all night upon the hills
 with you.

FATHER Well, come; and if you tire I'll
 carry you.
 You are no heavier than a yearling
 lamb;
 I've often borne one further.

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(On the way—the lad in his father's arms.)

Father, I saw her. It was she who said,
“Fear not,” and I looked up and
did not fear.

DAVID

You said she went God’s errands;
might it be
That she was sent to bring the little
Christ

Down to his mother in the Bethlehem
town?

Dear lad—

FATHER

She’d bear him well. Her hands are
strong and soft,

DAVID

And when she strokes your cheek, or
holds you close

Against her breast—

O David! hush, my lad; you break
my heart.

FATHER

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SCENE THREE

In the stable: The shepherds kneeling in awe and wonder while one tells the story of the vision to Joseph. Mary, seeing the little lad's wistful face, puts out her hand and draws him close to her. : : : : : : : : : : : : : : : : :

DAVID

He's such a little Christ—no bigger than
The babe my mother took with her to heaven.
Didst see the angel that brought the little Christ?
That was my mother—for my father says
She goes upon God's errands to and fro.
I think she surely brought him, for tonight
Upon the hills she came to tell us of him.

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I saw her in a glory like the sun;
She said: "Fear not," and all the an-
gels sang.

Upon the hills?

MARY

Yes, where we watched the sheep.
You heard the angels, lad? What did
they sing?

I cannot tell. I only saw my
mother,

And tried to keep her words fast in
my heart.

She said, "Good tidings of great joy,"
and then

She smiled at me, the way she used to
smile

When she had kissed me in my bed at
night,

And I would shut my eyes so I might
think

DAVID

MARY

DAVID

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She was still there, close by me in the dark.

MARY 'T is not so strange. I, too, have seen
an angel;

He spoke to me, and told me wondrous things.

DAVID May I touch him, the little baby Christ?

MARY Yes, kiss his hand; see how the tiny fingers

Cling around mine, like little perch-ing birds.

So dear—so sweet—and yet my very own—

Almost I wish that he were born like you

A shepherd lad, to lead the harmless sheep,

So I might fold him in my arms & smile

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Without a thought of Herod. Now
my fear,
An icy wind, blows through my new-
born joy
And chills it to the death, and makes
me tremble.

Yet God is strong—I will not be
afraid—

Sleep on, my little son. He'll keep
you safe,
He'll give His angels charge con-
cerning you.

*(Mary draws the babe to her bosom
and sings to him softly.)*

My soul doth magnify the Lord, for
behold from henceforth all genera-
tions shall call me blessed—

(The shepherds go out in silence.)

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SCENE FOUR

The shepherds linger a little in the courtyard of the inn, where groups of people are encamped and a fire burning. David, holding his father's hand, looks at the strange night-scene with wondering eyes. : : : : : : : : : : : : : : :

FATHER

THE dawn is near; we should be
on our way.

The sheep will soon be calling
from the fold.

FIRST
SHEPHERD

The sheep! Well, let them call,—
there's higher work

For us tonight than watching by a
sheep-fold.

We must go spread the tidings of the Christ.

THIRD
SHEPHERD
(An older man)

The town is full, and both the inns
o'erflowing,

And Roman soldiers here to speed
the taxing.

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If word were sent to Herod ^{that} a King
Was born to Israel, and the Bethlehem town

In a wild tumult, needs no prophet's tongue

To say what would befall. Let us go homeward,

And praise God as we go.

Aye, you are wise.
God set me to keep sheep, but oft at night

I speak with Him, as once King David did,

A little shepherd lad on these same hills.

I think He cares for all weak, helpless things

His hand has made, and so I must believe

FATHER

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THIRD
SHEPHERD
(musing)

That I can please Him best by doing well

The work He gave me, while I sing His praise.

A babe—a babe—and I am nigh fourscore.

When he is grown I shall sleep with my fathers,

And shall not see his triumph, if indeed

This be the Hope of Israel, the Messiah.

Well—God be praised for what my eyes have seen.

(Shepherds sing as they go a temple-song: Psalm 72.)

He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.

Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him. His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed.

Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things.

And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory—

“All nations,” that is what the angel said—

“Good tidings to all people,” and “great joy,”

And then she smiled, and went again to God.

DAVID
(half asleep murmurs)

Here endeth THE LITTLE LAD
of BETHLEHEM TOWN, being one
more story of that miraculous
time when a star shone to mark
the way to a stable. Told by
Emily Huntington Miller, who
is already known as the writer
of *From Avalon*, *For the Beloved*,
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THE ARRIVAL OF THE SHEPHERDS

H. LEROUX

*"Almost I wish that
he were born like you a
shepherd lad, to lead
the harmless
sheep."*

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